



Crafting the Need Statement (Source Grants.gov)

Background

The North Dakota State Library, our example applicant, focused their grant proposal on the need to train and equip librarians at small and rural libraries to organize “learn-to-code initiatives” for their local youth populations.

The organization was submitting the application for the fiscal year 2018 National Leadership Grants for Libraries (NLG-L) program, which aims to support “projects that address significant challenges and opportunities facing the library and archives fields and that have the potential to advance theory and practice.”

The official IMLS announcement goes on to explain that “successful proposals will generate results such as new tools, research findings, models, services, practices, or alliances that will be widely used, adapted, scaled, or replicated to extend the benefits of federal investment.”

Tip #1: Address the need that the funding opportunity is intended to fill – not the organization’s need for funding (Source: [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov)).

For this particular funding opportunity, applicants are able to submit proposals for a wide variety of needs. So, first, the applicant needs to confirm that the proposed program addresses a need that aligns with the opportunity announcement. The applicant then makes sure to define the need from the perspective of the public interest – in this case, librarians at rural and small libraries and the youth in their local communities.

In our example below, the applicant uses just a few sentences to communicate the need for training in coding instruction in rural, underserved regions:

“Efforts in recent years have expanded coding education, but limitations in both people and technology in rural areas has meant very little progress, resulting in a widening gap in access between

urban/suburban and rural populations. ... For example, a 2016 Google study found that computer science is a lower priority in rural schools. Public libraries serving small and rural communities throughout the U.S. can provide access and exposure to help young people achieve the gains from computer programming”

Tip #2: Communicate the organization’s familiarity with addressing the defined need (Source: [HRSA.gov](https://www.hrsa.gov)).

Getting specific about the applicant organization’s track record in the defined area of need helps to establish its credibility with the grant-making agency. This can be done in a range of ways, including by listing the names and relevant accomplishments of key team members, and/or by explaining how partners will contribute and play key roles in addressing the defined need.

In our example, the applicant writes:

“The Coding at Every Library project will leverage the expertise and toolsets developed by the project team over thousands of hours of coding in libraries and in programming for small and rural libraries over many years. The team has demonstrated success in helping library staff ...run consistent, well-attended, high quality code clubs. This proposal expands on the solutions already tested, piloted, and scaled by team members in a wide variety of public libraries. The Association for Rural and Small Libraries (ARSL) will consult on project design and assist in outreach, ensuring success with the project focused on coding at small and rural libraries ([page 7](#)).

Tip #3: Illustrate the need with a concise but concrete story.

Stories can help application evaluators to visualize the defined need and to grasp the challenges facing a project’s potential beneficiaries.

In our example, the applicant uses a story to illustrate how the proposed program will benefit both librarians and the youth populations they serve:

“The struggles to provide coding education in a rural library are evident in the story of Leslie, a librarian at the Wister branch of the Southeastern Public Library System of Oklahoma. As the only librarian in the smallest branch of a rural system, Leslie goes out of her way to offer valuable programming for her community, living up to her motto: ‘Little bitty library...great big services!’ Leslie had heard the buzz about coding programs, but with no understanding of computer programming she felt stuck. When she began working with grant partner Prenda in 2017, Leslie was able to implement a code club. She was amazed to see a strong demand, with over 25 kids showing up for the first session! Leslie worked with colleagues to secure grant funding and help launch code clubs in ten other rural libraries in Southeastern Oklahoma”